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**The Power of Living the Writerly Life: A Group Model for Women Writers**

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**Abstract**

Flourishing as a tenure-track faculty member in academia is no small feat. Best practices in writing are often neglected as faculty struggle to balance competing demands on their time. For women who tryto balance both home and work responsibilities, this task can be overwhelming. This study documents the outcomes of a writers’ group formed to increase the scholarly output of its members. Findings suggest that this writers’ group model not only has potential to increase writing productivity but also offers the possibility of producing unanticipated outcomes including support and encouragement leading to greater professional and personal balance.

**Introduction**

The 21st century academic climate has been well-documented as “chilly” for female university faculty members (Banet-Weisner, 2001). Many work full-time while managing numerous personal responsibilities. Life demands gain increasing complexity for women academicians who, while serving in multiple family and social roles, encounter the reality that locating supportive female mentors is difficult due to limited numbers of tenured female professors and the unwillingness of some faculty to add mentoring to their overfilled agendas. While research has suggested that academia should be more supportive of faculty who attempt to achieve the balance of work and home (Lewis, Rapport & Gambles, 2003; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Williams, 2000; Wilson, 1999), academic institutions continue to reward those faculty members whose main priority is their work (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006). Research documents that while gender bias in the academic workplace still exists, women may be unintentionally contributing to this problem either by not advocating for themselves (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) or by failing to support one another (Antonucci, 1980; Chesler, 2001; Hakim, 2000).

The American view of a successful female professional is one who balances a full-time career while rearing children and maintaining an efficiently run home. Female professionals often strive to be “superwomen” while it is more socially acceptable for males in the same professional roles to focus solely on their careers. The campus life of female academics includes what Kolondy (1998) terms a “hidden workload.” She argues that female faculty members typically assume hidden workload responsibilities that their male counterparts often ignore. Female university faculty members typically participate more in campus activities, assume roles as advisors, and focus more on teaching. While female faculty members see teaching as a pleasurable obligation enabling them to guide their students toward social change, they also note that such teaching is time-consuming (Ropers-Huilman, 2000). When advising, teaching, and service responsibilities are combined with the hidden workload of campus activities and home obligations, many female faculty members become overextended. Consequently, they are characteristically less productive publishers than males in similar positions (Cole, 1979; Cole & Cole, 1973; Converse & Converse, 1971; Persell, 1983; Whitley, 1987). Balancing a myriad of responsibilities often leads junior female faculty members to abandon tenure-track positions, thereby reducing numbers of females within tenured academic ranks (Banet-Weisner, 2001).

While the number of women receiving doctorates has increased within recent years, men at the rank of full professor continue to outnumber women (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). Such an imbalance results in limited availability of women who could potentially serve as mentors for female academics. Moreover, within professional circles women are often unsupportive of one another (Chesler, 2001). While overextended with the demands of home, it follows that many female faculty members may be unwilling or unable to assume mentorship roles. Adding the demands of mentoring might, in turn, undermine a mentor’s own productivity; yet, female faculty members tend to view connections with others who share similar interests or experiences as necessary for success in academic positions (Astin & Davis, 1993). Roper-Huilman (2000) extends this notion by reporting that connections made among female faculty members are important, not only for academic success, but personal satisfaction. Women’s groups can provide guidance and mentoring to nascent academics (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996), encourage more productive scholarship (Dickens & Sagaria, 1997), and provide a network of allies and support (Richardson, 1997).

The model described in this study challenged the tenets described above and resulted in both tangible and intangible benefits for members of a professional learning community. Specifically, a writers’ group comprised of five female university faculty members, each at different points in their tenure journeys, offered a framework for support in the high-stakes realm of academia. The purpose of this article is to document the outcomes of this effort to increase their scholarly productivity and to provide others a possible model for more productive scholarship.

**Context of the Study**

In order to be successful in higher education, faculty must teach well, demonstrate a solid record of service, and establish a focused research agenda with numerous publications. Wasburn (2007) notes that expectations for promotions and tenure are rising at both research and teaching institutions and there is increased pressure on junior faculty to publish early and often (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; Valian, 1999; Wilson, 2001). For faculty in higher education, this can be a daunting expectation and for women who often shoulder most of the household responsibilities including child and elder care, this task can be overwhelming. Many junior faculty members report feeling that academic work never ends and that the pressure to achieve tenure adds to this stress (Boice, 1992; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). While all junior faculty members may perceive many of the same barriers to tenure, women experience a more negative climate (Johnsrud & DesJarlais, 1994). Gatta and Roos (2004) note that

Put simply, the workplace is structured around the idea that the male professor has a full-time wife at home fulfilling the roles of childcare worker, elder care provider, maid, launderer, and chef, among other duties. This then allows the hypothetical male faculty member to dedicate time to his university work. (p.124)

However, no matter the context, women are still expected to publish or perish along with their male counterparts.

So how can female faculty members survive and flourish? This article reports on the results of a semester long study at one southeastern university where a professional learning community was created to encourage writing for publication. This writers’ group used a writing workshop approach (see Calkins, 1994) to help members become more efficient with the high-stakes demands of writing for publication through support, encouragement, and high expectations of group members. Though writing groups are not a new concept, this professional learning community of five women combined the best practice of writing workshop with the knowledge that connections made among female faculty members are important for academic success.

**the Writers’ group**

**Background**

Teachers of writing realize the importance of facilitating daily writing for children (Calkins, 1994, Graves, 1983). They know that in order for young writers to gain momentum, writing opportunities must be regular and ongoing. The same is true for adult writers. Like athletes, writers need consistent, intense, and focused practice sessions. They need to build their writing muscles with regular workouts (Goldberg, 1986; Murray, 1990). However, adults sometimes avoid writing because they strive to make their writing perfect from the start. They resist putting words on paper because they perceive writing as a high-stakes task where they are displaying their thoughts and ideas for the entire world to see. Elbow & Sorcinellli (2006) argue that writing is, in fact, low stakes, because unlike speaking, the author has the chance to revise, refine, and retract her thoughts before she makes them available to an audience. In order to overcome the perceived fear of writing and to become comfortable with writing, one must write daily. Donald Murray (1990), journalist and writing professor, recommended, “nulla dies sine linea – never a day without a line” (p. 43). The importance of daily writing is echoed by Parini (2005) who notes that, “A little work every day adds up” (p. B5). Given the demands placed on academicians, how do they adopt a regular writing schedule? They find support from others who share the same struggles as writers. They learn from the collective community how to work through challenges (Michell, 2006), and they find time away from the demands of life by escaping to a “writing place” (Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006, p. 2).

The impetus for this study was a realization by a senior faculty member, that while she espoused the tenants of writing workshop (see Calkins, 1994) to students in her former elementary classroom, she recognized that her own academic writing habits did not align with these principles. Knowing the value of collaboration and connections among female faculty members (Roper-Huilman, 2000), she invited four junior colleagues to join her in a professional learning community based on the writing workshop model. In plan, the group would write regularly and meet weekly with the primary goal of increasing academic writing productivity.

The senior faculty member responsible for founding this group had four major motives for beginning this collaborative writing endeavor. First, she had attended a state-wide leadership institute for women and learned that women typically do not mentor other women. Reflecting upon the fact that she, indeed, had been mentored almost solely by men, she sought to create a venue allowing her to mentor promising junior faculty members in her own department. Secondly, she hoped to help colleagues who were in pursuit of tenure increase their scholarly productivity. Additionally, she wanted to refine her research agenda allowing her to focus on one consistent line of inquiry and knew that she needed support and encouragement in order to accomplish this goal. Finally, she sought to alter her own writing habits after realizing the contradiction between her belief in writing regularly (as employed in writing workshop and as she espoused in the university courses that she taught) and her own practice of writing once a week or whenever she could reserve a large block of time.

**Selection of writers’ group members**

The group’s founder targeted four colleagues in her department who seemed, in her opinion, to be ideal members of an academic writers’ group. Selecting such a small number of individuals was inherently risky as she had collaborated with many of her 70+ fellow departmental faculty members on a variety of professional projects. She pondered the ramifications of organizing and initiating such a collaboration, which would greatly impact the individuals whom she chose. The four colleagues that she selected were tenure-track junior faculty members and all of whom exhibited great confidence in themselves as individuals and as emerging scholars. She was convinced that this was an asset, as there would be no impetus for flaunting their membership in an academic writers’ group among other colleagues who were not invited to be a part of the endeavor. Additionally, all individuals considered for group membership were serious about advancing their research agendas while serving in a variety of leadership and administrative roles, both in the university and in the wider community. She believed that each of them would devote the energy and effort needed to make such a group an asset, rather than a liability.

It was no accident that the potential members chosen to form the writers’ group were all women whom she considered to be friends, as well as colleagues. She recognized that in asking group members to commit to participation in a semester-long writers’ group that inviting those with whom she had no previous professional experience could be risky and perhaps undermine the success of the group. Thus, she chose individuals, whom she felt, due to their own strong sense of self, could move beyond their own self-interest and could contribute to the synergy of the group. Her history with each of these women was built on interactions involving shared leadership roles. Across a variety of personal and professional situations, the selected participants’ judgment and initiative had allowed her to learn that their efforts were often superior to hers. This was an important factor such that she could not only learn with them but from them. While the tenured member of the group knew each member well, the other four members had only superficial relationships with one another. All members had strong backgrounds in K-12 education. Two of the members were former state department consultants and had come to the university from these situations. For the other two members, this was their first faculty position. All were mothers, three with young children and one was a grandmother. Although they had many differences in terms of their backgrounds and current personal responsibilities, what they had in common was a keen desire and a compelling need to publish.

**Development of the Group**

**Direction of the writers’ group**

The guiding parameters as first defined by the senior faculty member were that meetings would convene on a regular basis and that each member must commit to writing daily. As the group evolved, it was determined collaboratively in ongoing negotiation how often to meet and the extent to which the meetings resembled the writing workshop model that the group members had all endorsed in their own classrooms prior to becoming university professors.

Traditional mentoring relationships involve a more knowledgeable or experienced mentor coaching a less experienced learner. Such arrangements have their roots dating across the pages of history (Osguthorpe & Scruggs, 1986), past Plato’s Academy of Athens to the caves of early man. This group differed, however, from typical mentoring arrangements as each group member was considered to be an equal contributor and there was an expectation of the mutual exchange of ideas and support that kept the group on equal footing. Each group member acted as a mentor at times, depending on the context, topic under discussion, and situation at hand. For example, the group looked to the expertise of one junior faculty group member, whose dissertation focused on the writing process, to shape the incorporation of writing workshop elements within the weekly meetings.

**Studying the effects of the group**

As the group formed, members agreed to study the impact of their participation in the writers’ group on their scholarly productivity for one semester. Group members determined that specific parameters would need to be in place in order to explore and examine their involvement and experience. After the first meeting, it was determined that each group member would keep a writing journal and, using auto-ethnographical principles, ultimately write self-portraits of their experience as a writing group member (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Coles, 1989). Ellis (2004) states that auto-ethnography captures the “narrative truth” (p. 30) of important experiences and claims that “all validity is interpretive and dependent on context” (p.123). In the case of the women involved in this study, auto-ethnography offered a lens for capturing the evocative and therapeutic dynamics that emerged as their academic writers’ group coalesced and evolved over a period of one semester. While writing auto-ethnographies and reporting them collectively is the ultimate goal of the group, the findings presented in this paper include only the first phase of the study which was guided by the research question, “What impact does an academic writers’ group have on writing productivity?” Data for this portion of the study included individual writing journals, minutes of weekly meetings (with hours spent writing and projected “next steps”), electronic data (including emails and microblog postings), and transcriptions from three video-taped meetings. Individual members read through the data set, recording memos (Birks, 2008), and coding for initial themes. After individual analysis, group members met to collectively share and discuss themes until consensus occurred.

**Writers’ Group Meetings**

The writers’ group members met on campus once a week for approximately one hour. Each weekly meeting was focused yet flexible. Meetings began with about 5-7 minutes of “catching up” and then quickly moved to each member sharing her writing for the week and the identifying reasonable writing goals for the upcoming week. Sometimes group members facilitated writing workshop style mini-lessons in which they examined, for example, article “leads” from mentor texts. Other times they sought advice about writing related problems or opportunities. Members spent time identifying and discussing barriers impeding their writing progress. Over time, members began to perceive the group as a safe place in which they could share their writing and seek both revision and editing feedback from one another related to writing in progress. It became commonplace for members to receive emails with manuscript attachments asking for feedback. In addition, members periodically met outside of the regularly scheduled meetings for peer conferences, often with the purpose of talking through an idea or a “rough spot” in a manuscript.

**Outcomes of the Writers’ Group**

At the end of the semester, group member analyzed their data individually and then met collectively in order to discuss and refine themes. Collective data analysis resulted in the identification of four themes related to participation in the writers’ group: (a) “living the writerly life,” (b) collective accomplishments and successes, (c) the power of the group, and (d) building a context for success. A description of each theme is offered in the following sections.

***Living the Writerly Life***

Lucy Calkins’ (1994) phrase, “living the writerly life,” captured an important and consistent goal of the group. In working toward living a writerly life, each member made writing a priority in her daily schedule, looking critically at her calendar and planning writing times that were non-negotiable. Knowing that university faculty members’ schedules can quickly become fragmented and overloaded, they practiced saying, “I’m sorry, I cannot meet with you at that time. I have another commitment,” in an effort to protect writing time. After analyzing their personal schedules, each member shared a plan in which she identified days and times that she committed to write. Plans varied per member and over time, but a commitment to more consistent writing was pervasive.

Members discovered that when they made writing a priority in their lives they wrote more consistently. One member reported that she wrote more in the past two months than she had in the past last two years. Members found that when they wrote daily, the topics about which they were writing remained prominent in their minds. As O’Leary (2003) explained, writers write even when they are not writing because they are rehearsing, revising, and working through a piece mentally. One member echoed O’Leary’s notion by sharing that she woke up in the middle of the night thinking about her writing. A brief brainstorm session ensued in which she jotted down her ideas before going back to sleep. Waking in the middle of the night and writing down ideas related to her job was not a common occurrence for this mother of three small children and illustrated the power of her daily writing regimen. Members also noted positive feelings toward writing time. In one instance, a group member sent an email to group members from her personal writing retreat over spring break. Her message conveyed a sense of anticipation and enjoyment as if the writing time was a gift to herself. Although it should be noted that members did not write daily, they did write more consistently, often three to four days per week. In her reflection log, another member noted that because she was “making writing a priority” she wrote four out of five days for at least 45 minutes. “I’m finding little snatches of time to write – as I’m waiting in the carpool line to pick up my kids from school, before my classes begin in the morning… writing is always on my mind.”

The second component of the “living the writerly life” theme was the realization that the writing process demands time. Members re-discovered writing as a process that involves many revisions and sometimes results in rejection. While they initially understood these facets of the writing process, especially in terms of teaching the writing process, it was challenging to apply this knowledge to their own academic writing. Members reminded one another that completed manuscripts evolve over time and benefit from a “resting” period, offering the author fresh eyes to view and critique her manuscript after a few days or even a week. Group members offered encouragement; reminding one another that editors could not accept their manuscripts if they did not take the initiative to complete and submit them. As members increasingly forwarded their writing to editors, though, they sometimes experienced the pang of rejection. Group members shared rejection letters with one another and did not allow rejected authors to wallow in self-pity too long. For example, when a group member shared news of a rejected manuscript, group members followed by asking her to identify an alternative peer-reviewed journal that she should consider for submission. In email communication, one member wrote, “I just skimmed the comments but I kept hearing that the reviewers think this is a worth and publishable study! Let’s keep each other motivated to put our manuscripts out there again. Do you have a new timeline or do you need a few days to process this news? I won’t let you stew for long because I BELIEVE in you!” Members reminded one another that they should be persistent in submitting and resubmitting their work.

The third aspect of the “living the writerly life” theme is acknowledging that a writers’ life ebbs and flows, resulting in peaks and valleys in writing production. Group members sometimes experienced bursts of enthusiastic writing and other times reported periods of writers’ block and waning enthusiasm. When faculty annual reports were due and members reported that they were struggling to find extended writing time, one member shared the following quote on the group’s microblog website, “I’m freaking out a bit because I haven’t written and now other things have shifted into the top spots in terms of my time … like my annual report. Ugh. How’s everyone else doing?” She was clearly frustrated that writing shifted down on her priority list. In another example of the “ups and downs” of academic writing, a group member was thrilled to report the acceptance of a manuscript to a well-respected journal at a weekly meeting. A few days later, she learned that another article had been lost by the editor and a third article was rejected. Despite these frustrations, members were encouraged by words from a writing mentor, a colleague from another university. Via phone conference at a regular weekly meeting, this respected writer and researcher shared stories of decreased writing productivity and encouraged group members to keep writing.

On another occasion, a writers’ group member shared a story about a prolific literacy researcher, whose well-known article was rejected five times before it was finally published. These reminders were integral to the recognition that writer’s block and rejection are realities. Group meetings that addressed these issues contributed to the maintenance of members’ writing momentum.

**Collective Accomplishments and Successes**

The group’s original intent of a semester-long “experiment” maintained its integrity and achieved both intended and unintended outcomes. As asserted previously, the members of this academic writers’ group experienced a marked increase in confidence as writers and thrived as members of this supportive group. Though it might be argued that these positive outcomes stand alone as worthy reasons for forming an academic writers’ group, the members knew that they had to log significant writing hours and generate publications. During three months of data collection, the group members spent a total of 380 hours writing, with each group member averaging approximately seven hours per week. This number stood in stark contrast to the writing plan that members employed prior to the joining the writers’ group. Before, these women followed the advice handed out by fellow academics – to set aside one day a week for writing. In reality, they found that other duties related to teaching, service, or personal/family issues crept into those writing days. What often began as a five hour writing day morphed into a two and a half hour block of time, much of which was spent rereading the current manuscript and becoming reacquainted with the piece.

In addition to logging a significant number of writing hours, the members of this group submitted 13 manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed journals, seven of which were accepted for publication. Manuscripts were not the only scholarly work to be produced by the members of this writers’ group; they also participated in 19 professional conference presentations. These outcomes offered tangible evidence of the group’s success.

As the weekly writers’ group meetings progressed, the participants spent many hours discussing their future direction as researchers. Through these conversations, each realized that she was involved in research projects that were opportunistic, meaning they were invited to collaborate with colleagues on projects. Rather than aligning research studies with specific goals and personal interests they often found themselves engaged in projects that loomed over them like black clouds. The group dubbed these projects “the monkeys on their backs.” They tended to avoid working on these projects because they had little motivation to complete writing in which they had little personal investment. As the weekly writing reports were shared, the group members realized that the same projects recurred on the “next steps” list week after week. Progress on these projects was slow, if not stalled altogether. These women realized that they wanted to write about topics that were of importance and value to them. Therefore, the need to develop a focused research agenda became an important topic of the weekly meetings as well as a topic of reflection in their writing journals. Group members discovered or perhaps rediscovered their passion for writing and committed to refining their research agendas.

**The Power of the Group**

Beyond the tangible quantifiable benefits of participating in the group, all group members reported a host of intangible benefits. Group members felt they had a “safety net” of support with their writing and with the other aspects of university life.

One member reported,

The writers’ group is where I go to get re-charged, where I can share all my fears about teaching and tenure and know that I’ll have a group willing to listen, to offer support and to force me to stop whining and to get back on track. While the group has definitely helped my publication record, it is so much more than that to me.

Unconsciously, participation in the writers’ group gave group members the courage to begin to say “no” to opportunities that might interfere or place too many demands on an already overloaded schedule. For example, at the conclusion of one meeting, a member of the group asked for advice about an opportunity that she had been given. An editor with whom she had worked for a few years asked her to write a comprehensive book review article, which was to be an extension of a brief piece that she has already completed. She shared with the group that this would be an enjoyable piece to write because it focused on a topic of interest and she felt obligated to say “yes” to this particular editor because they had a good working relationship. On the other hand, she shared that the project would be fairly time-consuming. Discussion ensued in which group members pointed out that the piece would not be peer-reviewed and therefore not valued in terms of tenure and promotion. Ultimately, the group member emailed the editor and declined the opportunity. If she had not discussed this opportunity with the group, this member confessed that she would have said “yes” to this opportunity, resulting in less time spent on more valuable writing goals. This decision did not compromise her relationship with the editor and reinforced the notion that she could say “no” to opportunities that did not align with her research goals.

**Building a Context for Success**

Based on data from the collective sharing of each member’s story written from the contents of writing journals and analysis of the weekly writing notes, the following structural components of the writers’ group were identified as factors that contributed to its success: commitment to the group, regularly-scheduled and focused meetings, writing workshop format, writing logs, and reasonable next steps. The senior faculty member established a context for success by defining the obligation to write consistently and attend regularly scheduled writers’ group meetings. At the outset, each group member was anxious to find time in her daily schedule for writing. Some were able to set aside the same writing time every day (e.g., first hour in the morning) while others had to be creative with the scheduling, setting aside a different block of time each day. Once the group members discovered their rhythm, they began looking forward to their regular writing routine.

A second component that led to the success of the group was the routine provided by weekly writers’ group meetings. The meetings were short and focused. With a self-imposed one hour time limit, group discussions were be clear and focused. The commitment to the group was so strong that no one wanted to miss a writers’ group meeting. Members did everything they could to attend the weekly meetings. They began to treat it as a “non-negotiable” item on their calendar and the writers’ group meetings soon became a commitment set in stone much like teaching a face-to-face course. When professional conferences or other commitments required a group member to be away from campus, she participated electronically, via telephone or Skype Internet conversations.

During several weekly meetings, the group employed a writing workshop format with mini-lessons, peer conferences, and sharing. Sometimes the mini-lessons focused on refining a specific part of the manuscript such as the lead or conclusion. Other times the mini-lesson served as a forum for sharing possible publication venues. Much like the writing workshop espoused by Avery (2002), Calkins (1993), and Graves (1983), the writers’ group meetings provided a safe environment in which the writers could take risks. They shared their writing without fear of rejection or failure, accepting constructive feedback on manuscripts.

Writing logs were a critical component of the writers’ group (See Appendix A). Each member kept a running log of writing hours and weekly accomplishments which were reported at the weekly meetings. These logs were powerful because they forced each member to be precise about what they accomplished as writers every week. The reports also created positive peer pressure among the group members, as colleagues did not want to disappoint group members with a non-productive writing week.

The final structural component, one the group named “reasonable next steps,” developed over time. Rather than focusing on *all* that needed to be accomplished on a manuscript or conference presentation, the process was broken into small steps such as “revise the methodology section” or “read x number of articles for the literature review.” These next steps were to be accomplished by the next weekly meeting, so they had to be reasonable. When a group member began listing too many tasks, another was quick to question whether or not they were realistically reasonable considering other obligations in the upcoming week. Accountability became an intentional goal and valuable outcome of the writers’ group. There was accountability to the group, but more importantly, members felt accountability to themselves. See Appendixes B and C for sample meeting notes with hours spent writing and “next steps.”

**Conclusion**

For any faculty in higher education, writing for publication can be a daunting expectation and for women faculty who often juggle hidden workloads along with transparent ones, the expectations can be overwhelming. This expectation is a particular challenge for women who also serve in administrative and leadership roles. Best practices in writing are often neglected as faculty struggle to balance competing demands on their time. The women in this writers’ group found that within the group there was much power and that best practice could be achieved. They were able to discuss their concerns, seek support, and redirect their energies toward publications from the myriad of tasks that dominated their day. Their conviction about the worth of this collective experience has led them to share their ideas for establishing a writers’ group with other academics.

Based on the outcomes of this study, there is great value in establishing a professional learning community of writers among women academics. In doing so, members of the group encourage others to establish a writers’ group by going through the sequential process of (a) assessing the context of their setting, (b) selecting group members who can adhere to a shared mission, (c) establishing procedures and guidelines collaboratively with one another, (d) agreeing to document both individual and collective ongoing writing progress, and (e) reviewing, analyzing, and evaluating the successes and challenges of group members through both formative and summative approaches. Sharing the writers’ group model described in this study at professional meetings and conferences has resulted in the establishment of similar professional learning communities among tenure-track faculty members and doctoral students at three universities in the eastern United States. Acknowledging that the results of this writers’ group cannot be generalized to the general population, the authors believe that the model holds potential to be adapted in other settings and situations.

The support, encouragement, and additional rewards gained from working collectively toward the goal of writing for publication on a regular basis offered the faculty members in this study, not only the desired increase in their writing productivity, but also a host of constructive outcomes that were not anticipated. The lives of the members of this professional learning community have been forever changed by their membership in a group that has reacquainted them with the power of “living the writerly life.” They continue to navigate the waters of academia as a group of writers who learned to accomplish communally what they were unable to accomplish on their own.

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Appendix A

Spring 2008 Writing Log of One Writers’ Group Member

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Start / Ending Time** | **Worked On** | **Total Time** |
| 1/21/1008 | 10-11 | Dana manuscript | 1 hour |
|  |  |  |  |
| 1/22/2008 | 8-8:30 | Dana manuscript | 30 minutes |
| 1/25/2008 | 9:45-11 | Dana manuscript | 1 hour, 15 min. |
| 1/27/2008 | 1:30-3:45 | Dana manuscript; sent it to co-author for feedback | 2 hours, 15 min. |
|  |  |  |  |
| 2/6/2008 | 10-11 | Dana manuscript | 1 hour |
| 2/7/2008 | 11-noon | Dana manuscript | 30 min. |
| 2/9/2008 | 3-4 | Dana manuscript | 30 min. |
| 2/10/2008 | 3-5:30 | Dana manuscript; Sent Dana manuscript to GA for APA work; MLS presentation with RG and MT | 2 hours, 30 min. |
|  |  |  |  |
| 2/13/2008 | 11:30-12:00  1:30-2:30  3:30-4:30 | NCARE presentation; sent it to DK  MLS presentation  MLS presentation | 2 hours, 30 min. |
| 2/14/2008 | 4:30-5:10 | NCARE presentation | 40 min. |
| 2/15/2008 | 12-12:30 | Finished Dana manuscript and sent to Amy | 30 min. |
|  |  |  |  |
| 2/19/2008 | 9-11  3:45-4:30 | PMPB chapter  Dana manuscript Lit review | 2 hours  45 min. |
| 2/20/2009 | 1:30-2:30 | NRC conf proposal | 1 hour |
| 2/21/2008 | 3:45-4:45 | Dana manuscript | 1 hour |
| 2/22/2008 | 2:45-3:45 | Lit review | 1 hour |
|  |  |  |  |
| 2/28/2008 | 2:45-5:15 | Lit review | 2 hours, 30 min. |
| 2/29/2008 | 2:45-5:00 | Intro, lit review | 2 hours, 15 min. |
| 3/1/2008 | 2-3 | Lit review | 1 hour |
| 3/2/2008 | 12:30-4:00 | Intro, lit review; sent to co-author for feedback | 3 hours, 30 min. |
|  |  |  |  |
| 3/6/2008 | 3:45-5:15 | Address Amy’s concerns; fill in references; printed had copy for review | 1 hour, 30 min. |
| 3/12/2008 | 1-3 | Finish conclusions, added ref. , etc.; sent to writers’ group | 2 hours |
| 3/14/2008 |  | Reviewed R.’s JCL piece | 45 min. |
| 3/16/2008 | 9:30-10:45 | Revised based on WG feedback; drafted submission letter to NE editors | 1 hour, 15 min. |
| 3/17/2008 |  | Submission letter to editors of NE addressing each concern | 45 min. |
|  |  |  |  |
| 3/20/2008 | 9:30-11:30 | NCARE proceedings | 2 hours |
| 3/21/2008 | 1-2:30 | Finished and submitted Dana manuscript to NE (abstract, formatting, letter) | 2 hours |
| 3/24/2008 | 11-1 | PMPB chapter; emailed editors about diss manuscript – it is awaiting editor’s decision | 2 hours |
|  |  |  |  |
| 3/26/2008 | 9:30-11:15 | Went to library – PMPB chapter | 1 hour, 45 min. |
| 3/27/2008 | 4-4:45 | For PMPB chapter: Webinar by Dept. of Ed tech person about technology | 45 minutes |
| 3/28/2008 | 12:30-1:15 | PMPB chapter | 45 minutes |
| 4/1/2008 | 1:30-2 | NCARE proceedings | 30 minutes |

Appendix B

Meeting Notes from a Writers’ Group Meeting on March 4, 2008

**3-4-08**

**Opening Discussion:**

-National Reading Conference Proposal – will share and edit via email. Elizabeth will submit on March 4. Will know in July.

-Need to read female mentoring literature…submit article to journal –*Advancing Women in Leadership* -www.advancingwomen.com

-ATE August 2-6 Washington DC …Johna to follow-up (ask about this next time…we did not discuss)

-Mini-lesson on great leads…share short piece by Kilpatrick. Elizabeth is paying attention in lit review to beginnings and endings. Robin pleased with beginnings and wants to work on endings.

-Pownce…communicate about writing? Elizabeth has signed on.

***Writing reports:***

**Robin:**

-7.5 hours because she has deadlines.

-Editing NRC proposal

-submitted NRC proposal for service learning

-deadline for Journal of Children’s Lit. extended…have a draft for the article and needs to revise it.

-Compare NRC lit review..pre/post

These meetings help keep writing on her mind.

ROBIN’S NEXT STEPS:

-revise Children’s Lit article

-ask for feedback for article by posting on Pownce

-incorporate feedback as it comes back

-Compare NRC lit review..pre/post

-SEDONA

**Elizabeth:**

-9 hours on Dana manuscript. Worked on introduction; went back to the literature; made a chart to organize what she had. This helped a great deal.

-Editing NRC proposal

-Sent article to Amy, just received feedback.

ELIZABETH’S NEXT STEPS:

-Work on Dana manuscript…implications and conclusions

-(back burner)I need to work more diligently on the chapter ... nail down an introduction and flesh out the instructional aspects of postmodern picture books.

-Try to send something to friends on Pownce

-SEDONA

**Melissa:**

-Here are my accomplishments for the past week: I wrote for 8 1/2 hours  
and made good progress! I finally have the beginnings of a draft that I  
think is headed in the right direction. I believe this "brain dump"  
(first very rough draft) is more than half completed and I know exactly  
where I'm going with it next! Needless to say, I am thrilled with this  
initial success.

MELISSA’S NEXT STEPS:

-My plans for next week are to finish the first draft.  
I'll be in Blacksburg for two days and will spend as much time writing  
as is possible. I'll then let the draft "get cold" for a day and will  
begin the process of reworking it. If AT ALL POSSIBLE, I'll bring you a  
finished first (and very rough) draft when we return from Spring Break.  
If I can't achieve that goal I will not beat myself up.

-Try to send something to friends on Pownce

-SEDONA

**Johna:**

-3 hours on presentations for ATE

-feedback on NRC proposal

-Compare NRC lit review..pre/post

-contributed to NRC proposal

JOHNA’S NEXT STEPS:

-work on NC Middle School Conference presentation

-working to schedule a day to work on digital inking article

-Try to send something to friends on Pownce

-SEDONA

**Terry:**

-11 hours on NRC Proposal

TERRY’S NEXT STEPS:

-Work on Science piece.

-Reread science piece and organize

-Try to send something to friends on Pownce

-SEDONA

Final comments…. Good writing takes time…..

Videotape next meeting…Robin to “mini-lesson”.

Appendix C

Meeting Notes from a Writers’ Group Meeting that Focused on Goals

**AGENDA 1-13-09**

**MUCH TO ACCOMPLISH…Let’s adhere to this schedule.**

Hellos (5 minutes)

DISCUSSION SEE BELOW…(20 minutes)

1) A list of writing/research accomplishments since our last meeting on Nov. 25. If you have an estimate of time, that is fine, but the list of accomplishments is much more important.

2) A list of your goals for the year and a statement or two about how much you have accomplished OR if you need to "reframe" your goals.

3) Set our "next steps" for next week.

4) Set a meeting schedule for the semester (5 minutes).

5) Decide if we want to submit a NRC proposal for next year (Groups have formed at UNC-G, George Mason, and Syracuse as a result of our presentation...we would ask them if they want to join us.) (10 minutes)

6) Decide if we want to try and submit our autoethnography to the NRC Yearbook.  (remainder of time)

If we decide to do # 2 & #3, I cannot take the lead on both as we are getting ready to gear up our READ search "big-time." I meet with the Dean about the search today. This will take a large amount of my time. Thus, I will need someone else to take the lead on at least one of these, if not both. I am happy to contribute significantly to both, but cannot take the lead for both and do a decent job.

5) OTHER ITEMS…

**WRITING REPORTS:**

**Elizabeth**

My accomplishments since our last meeting:

* I wrote and submitted half of the SLJ book reviews that are due today.
* I thought a lot about my research agenda. In that vein, I worked with a colleague to hatch and develop (still developing) a study related to my passion – comprehension, book clubs, etc. (YAY!)

Total hours … approximately 10.

In revisiting the goals I put forth in August of 2008 …

* I revised my dissertation manuscript;
* I resubmitted dissertation manuscript to JoLLE;
* I got the Dana manuscript published (The New Educator); I presented at NRC in Orlando;
* I submitted the JoCI proposal to SITE and it was accepted.
* Two goals that I did not complete are (1) work on a manuscript with the Writing Group (this will carry over into the Fall) and (2) write a manuscript related to JoCI with the JoCI editors (I did, however, work to develop a research agenda related to JoCI).

**Goals to be achieved by May 2009** (is this too much??)

* Finish SLJ book reviews
* Get dissertation manuscript published in a peer-reviewed journal
* Submit manuscript with Writing Group
* Submit NRC proposal for 2010
* Present at IRA in May (if funding permits)
* Present *JoCI* at SITE in March (if funding permits)
* Work on *JoCI* research agenda with JoCI editors
* Develop specific research questions, methods, lit. review, etc. and get IRB approval for Book Club study

For next week:

* Finish SLJ book reviews
* Develop specific research questions, methods, lit. review, etc. and get IRB approval for Book Club study

**Melissa**

My accomplishments since our last meeting:

* Over the break I wrote for 22 hours. The good news is that after totally restructuring the article, I passed it to the second author and she sent it back. Today I will make the revisions and prepare it to send to a publisher. The monkey is about to jump off my back at long last! I also have been revising the RT piece in preparation for resubmission.  
    
  Goals for the year:

**1st Semester:**

1. With Terry Atkinson, conduct the Mixed Text Reader’s Theater project.

* Meet with teachers to plan the project.
* Develop research questions.
* Introduce project to students.
* Conduct field observations.
* Maintain a researcher’s journal.
* Interview teachers.  
  Terry and I have done everything except interview the teachers. The project is on hold at the request of the teachers and may resume when one teacher returns after recovery from surgery.

1. Resubmit the Science Trade-book article to *Reading Teacher*. Article resubmitted and accepted.
2. Wait patiently to hear back about the two articles I submitted for publication last spring.

* If either or both are accepted, rejoice and celebrate.
* If either or both are rejected, based on feedback rework the piece(s) for submission elsewhere.  The first article was lost by the editor and I resubmitted it. I am still waiting to hear. The second article was rejected and Terry and I are seeking a new place to submit it. I have been working on revisions to the second piece.

1. Figure out how to write the follow-up piece to the rigor article.

* Meet with Katie and Liz to plan the article.
* Write the literature review.
* Draft the article.
* Submit the article for publication. As mentioned above, I have all but met this goal. Later this week, I will submit it after the second author has approved final revisions.

1. Present at NAGC and NRC. I did both of these.
2. Work with writers’ group to publish an article about our work.  I have not begun to work on this.

**2nd Semester:**

1. Continue the Mixed Text Reader’s Theater project. As mentioned above, this is on hold.
2. In late spring, begin the draft of a second Mixed Text Reader’s Theater article.  Unless the project continues, there is little chance this will happen.

Life can be funny. I've been feeling really down lately about my life as a writer thinking I had not accomplished much of anything this fall. I feel better now that I look at the goals I set for the year and see that I am making progress.

**Next week:**

* Make a decision on Reader’s Theater resubmission
* Rework Reader’s Theater piece

**Robin**

Accomplishments since last meeting:

* Um… none…sadly I did not even think about writing.  My brain was so fried after NRC and grading that I just relaxed and got my personal life in order.  I really think that time away from my writing and my more organized home life (clean closets and trips to Goodwill) will allow me to refocus.  It’s a bit like a new haircut for me! (Elizabeth will probably get this analogy.)

Goals:

            Upon reviewing my goals from last semester, I found that I completed the following:

* Revised Mentor Text article        🗸
* Revised and resubmitted dissertation       🗸
* Writer’s Group NRC presentation             🗸
* Service Learning NRC presentation          🗸
* International Service Learning Conference presentation      🗸
* Teacher education lit review (matrix completed – still needs to be written)
* 1 or 2 publications accepted 🗸
* Have at least one manuscript in the pipeline at all times    🗸

SPRING 2009 Goals:

* Draft lit review for READ 3210 study (January 30)
* Data Analysis for READ 3210 study (by March 6)
* Submit READ 3210 study (April 24)
* LTLS manuscript for Journal of School Connections (February 23 deadline – self-imposed)
* Submit WG NRC presentation (Feb. 11)

Statement:  I plan to be VERY busy WRITING this semester!  I have to have some manuscripts submitted.

Next week:

* Making a plan for analyzing the data   for READ 3210 study
* Begin Drafting the lit review for READ 3210 study (January 30)

**Johna**

**Accomplishments** (I did not keep up with hours exactly but I spent about 20 hours devoted to writing)

* Completed the majority of the lit review for higher education article--plan to have draft ready for the group by next Tuesday. I think we'll have an article to submit before their March deadline.
* Have the IRB (3rd try) ready for everyone's signatures tomorrow
* I spent the holiday reshaping my agenda

**Goals**

* I plan to have the draft ready for the group by 01/22/09 for the higher ed article; Plan to submit article by February 20 for the March Deadline
* Plan to frame out my projects based on my workload and research interests--*How to get the Bang for the Buck?* is my question and I need some guidance. I need to focus on small tasks which will produce articles. Does the group have any suggestions?

**Statement**-I am working on refining my agenda. I need to actually focus and PRODUCE articles.

**Next week:**

* Recommit to writing daily
* Draft of article
* IRB in mailboxes

**Terry**

Accomplishments-  
-Co-wrote article for JoCi transformative leadership issue with Gabbard

-Conferred with Gerry, Seth, Dixie about thoughtfully adaptive teaching study to be embedded within READ 6422…worked on related issues (video availability, research questions, interview protocols, NRC proposal, IRB draft)

-Investigated venues suggested by word study experts at NRC…will make final decision this week

1st Semester:

1. With Melissa Matusevich, conduct the Mixed Text Reader’s Theater project. **(completed)**

* Meet with teachers to plan the project.
* Develop research questions.
* Introduce project to students.
* Conduct field observations.
* Maintain a researcher’s journal.
* Interview teachers.

1. Make revisions and resubmit the Science Trade-book article to *Reading Teacher*. **(completed)**
2. Wait patiently to hear back about the Mixed Text Reader’s Theater articles submitted for publication last spring.
   * If accepted, rejoice and celebrate.
   * If rejected, based on feedback rework the piece(s) for submission elsewhere. **(in progress)**
3. Add to lit review for word study piece.
   * Meet with Guili and Nancy to finalize.
   * Submit to JAAL.
4. Work on paper for NRC and present. **(completed)**
5. Work with Dixie and Robin to establish research questions for Moodle collaboration

**(some progress/ongoing)**

Work with Dixie on response to Duffy’s piece **(some progress/ongoing)**

2nd Semester:

1. Continue focusing on goals for first semester. (NEED TO FURTHER REFINE THIS ONE).
2. NCRA presentation and data
3. In late spring, begin the draft of a second Mixed Text Reader’s Theater article.

ULTIMATE GOAL: At least one piece in print.

Next week:

Send Reader’s Theater piece

Send back Reading Teacher

Meet 9:30-10:30 Tuesdays